

Issue Brief for Congress

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Endangered Species: Difficult Choices

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SUMMARY

The 107th Congress may consider whether to reauthorize and amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). Major issues in recent years have focused on whether to incorporate further protection for property owners and reduce regulatory impacts, whether to increase the protection afforded listed species, or whether to clarify various aspects of the Act, such as the role of science in decision-making. The Clinton Administration made significant changes to ESA regulations, and many have advocated including these changes in the law itself.

The ESA has been one of the more contentious environmental laws. This may stem from the strict substantive provisions of this law, which can affect the use of both federal and non-federal lands. Under the ESA, certain species of plants and animals (both vertebrate and invertebrate) are listed as either “endangered” or “threatened” according to assessments of the risk of their extinction. Once a species is listed, powerful legal tools are available to aid the recovery of the species and the protection of its habitat. The ESA is administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for terrestrial and freshwater species and some marine mammals, and by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for

marine and anadromous species. The U.S. Geological Survey’s Biological Resources Division conducts research on species for which the FWS has management authority.

The authorization for spending under ESA expired on October 1, 1992. The prohibitions and requirements of the ESA have remained in force, even in the absence of an authorization, and funds were appropriated to implement the administrative provisions of the ESA in each subsequent fiscal year.

The Senate Environment Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Water has held an oversight hearing on the ESA listing and delisting process. Other hearings have been held by House and Senate committees on specific issues, and additional hearings are anticipated. In the 107th Congress, a number of bills have been introduced to address specific issues, while only two bills (S. 911 and H.R. 4579) have been introduced to deal comprehensively with reauthorization and a host of ESA issues. On the international side, reauthorizations for the African Elephant Conservation Act (P.L. 107-111, the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act of 1994 (P.L. 107-112), and the Asian Elephant Conservation Act (P.L. 107-141) were enacted.

MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

On June 18 and 19, 2002, the House Committee on Resources held a hearing on H.R. 4840, proposing to amend the ESA regarding the use of science in decision-making under the ESA. Full committee markup of H.R. 4840 has been scheduled for July 10, 2002. On June 18, 2002, H.R. 3558, authorizing grants to states and local governments to combat invasive species, was reported (amended) by the House Committee on Resources (H.Rept. 107-512). On May 10, 2002, the House passed H.R. 4546, including §312 that would limit the designation of critical habitat for endangered species on Department of Defense lands.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Overview

The 1973 ESA (16 U.S.C. 1531-1543; P.L. 93-205, as amended) is a comprehensive attempt to protect all species and to consider habitat protection as an integral part of that effort. Under the ESA, species of plants and animals (both vertebrate and invertebrate) may be listed as either “endangered” or “threatened” according to assessments of the risk of their extinction. More flexible management can be provided for a species listed as threatened. Distinct population segments of vertebrate species may also be listed as threatened or endangered, and some populations of chinook, coho, chum, and sockeye salmon in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and California are protected under the ESA while other healthy populations of these same species in Alaska are not listed and can be commercially harvested. More limited protection is available for plant species under the ESA (16 U.S.C. 1532). Once a species is listed, powerful legal tools, including penalties and citizen suit provisions, are available to aid the recovery of the species and the protection of its habitat. Use of these tools, or the failure to use them, has led to conflict.

As of March 31, 2002, a total of 1,070 species of animals and 746 species of plants had been listed as either endangered or threatened, of which the majority (515 species of animals and 743 species of plants) occur in the United States and its territories and the remainder only in other countries. Of the 1,258 U.S. species, 977 are covered in recovery plans. (See the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) at [<http://endangered.fws.gov/>] and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) at [<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/endangered.htm>].)

At times, efforts to protect and recover listed species can be controversial; declining species can function like the proverbial canary in the coal mine, since declining species often flag larger issues of resource scarcity and altered ecosystems. Past resource debates in which ESA-listed species were part of larger issues include Tennessee’s Tellico Dam (water storage and construction jobs versus farmland protection and tribal graves, as well as the snail darter); Pacific northwest timber harvest (protection of logging jobs and communities versus commercial and sport fishing, recreation, and ecosystem protection, as well as salmon and spotted owls); and Texas’s Edwards Aquifer (allocation of water among various users with differing short- and long-term interests, as well as several spring-dependent species). Some current issues are discussed below.

Prohibitions and Penalties. The Act contains civil and criminal penalties for “take” of endangered species, which means to “harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect or attempt to engage in any such conduct” (16 U.S.C. 1532; harassment and harm are further defined in regulation at 50 C.F.R. 17.3). There has been controversy over the extent to which habitat modification is prohibited. A 1995 Supreme Court decision held that the inclusion of significant habitat modification was a reasonable interpretation of the term “harm” in the ESA. (See CRS Report 95-778 A, *Habitat Modification and the Endangered Species Act: The Sweet Home Decision.*)

Listing. Species may be listed on the initiative of the appropriate Secretary or by petition from a state or federal agency — including FWS or NMFS, another entity or an individual. The Secretary must decide whether to list the species based only on the best available scientific and commercial information, after an extensive series of procedural steps to ensure public participation and the collection of information. In making the decision as to whether a species needs the protections of the Act, the Secretary may not take into account the economic effects that listing may have; economic and other considerations are taken into account in structuring alternatives for assisting the species. (See CRS Report RL30792, *The Endangered Species Act: Consideration of Economic Factors*, for an analysis of when and where the ESA does allow consideration of economic factors.)

Critical Habitat. With certain exceptions, if a species is listed, the appropriate Secretary must designate critical habitat (CH) – areas where the species is currently found or which might provide additional habitat for the species recovery. However, if the publication of this information is not “prudent” because it could harm the species (e.g., by encouraging vandals or collectors), the appropriate Secretary may decide not to designate CH. The appropriate Secretary may also postpone designation for up to one year if the information is not determinable (16 U.S.C. 1533). As a practical matter, CH has not been designated for many listed species in large part because of a FWS regulation a court has found to be an unlawful interpretation of the Act in that it does not take into account the recovery of listed species. While any area, whether or not federally owned, may be designated as CH, private land is affected by designation primarily if some federal action (e.g., license, loan, permit, etc.) is also involved, such that “consultation” is necessary. Federal agencies must avoid “adverse modification” of CH, either through their own actions or activities that are federally approved or funded.

Recovery Plans. The appropriate Secretary must develop recovery plans for the conservation and survival of listed species. At first, recovery plans tended to cover birds and mammals, but a 1988 amendment forbade the Secretary from favoring particular taxonomic groups (16 U.S.C. 1533). The ESA and regulations provide little detail on the requirements for recovery plans, and these plans are not binding on federal agencies or others.

Land Acquisition and Cooperation. The federal government may acquire land to conserve (recover) endangered and threatened species, and money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund may be appropriated for this acquisition (16 U.S.C. 1534). The appropriate Secretary must cooperate with the states in conserving protected species and must enter into cooperative agreements to assist states in their endangered species programs, if the programs meet certain specified standards. If there is a cooperative agreement, the states may receive federal funds to implement the program, but the states must normally provide a minimum 25% matching amount. Under the 1988 amendments, a fund was created

to provide for the state grants. While the authorized size of the fund is determined according to a formula, money from the fund still requires annual appropriation (16 U.S.C. 1535).

Permits. There are two ways in which proposed actions can be evaluated for possible adverse impacts on listed species and permits issued. First, if federal agency actions or actions of a non-federal party that require an agency's approval, permit, or funding may affect a listed species, the federal agency must ensure that those actions are "not likely to jeopardize the continued existence" of any endangered or threatened species, nor to adversely modify CH. To review the possible effects of their actions on listed species and CH, federal agencies must consult with the appropriate Secretary. If the Secretary finds that an action would jeopardize a listed species or adversely modify CH, the Secretary must suggest reasonable and prudent alternatives that would avoid harm to the species. Pending completion of the consultation process, agencies may not make irretrievable commitments of resources that would foreclose any alternatives. The Secretary may issue a written statement that allows incidental taking of a species, subject to terms and conditions specified in the statement (16 U.S.C. 1536).

For actions without a federal nexus (i.e., no federal funding, permit, or license), the appropriate Secretary may issue permits to allow the "incidental take" of species during otherwise lawful actions. An applicant for a permit must submit a conservation plan that shows the likely impact of the planned action, steps to be taken to minimize and mitigate the impact, and funding for the mitigation; alternatives that were considered and rejected; and any other measures that the Secretary may require. The FWS and NMFS have vastly expanded use of this section and provided streamlined procedures for activities with minimal impacts (16 U.S.C. 1539).

Exemptions; Emergencies. Proponents of federal action may apply for an exemption from §7(a)(2) of the ESA for that action (not for a species). Under the ESA, a Committee (commonly called the "God Squad") of six specified federal officials and a representative of each affected state must decide whether to allow a project to proceed despite future harm to a species; at least five votes are required to pass an exemption. To date, this process has been little used and only one exemption (Grayrocks Dam, WY) fully granted. The President may grant exemptions for actions in declared disaster areas, but the ESA does not address emergency actions or situations. The Committee must grant an exemption if the Secretary of Defense determines that an exemption is necessary for national security (16 U.S.C. 1536). To date, no security exemption has been sought. (For further discussion, see CRS Report 90-242 ENR, *Endangered Species Act: The Listing and Exemption Processes*.)

Miscellaneous. Other provisions specify certain exemptions for raptors; regulate subsistence activities by Alaskan Natives; prohibit interstate transport and sale of listed species and parts; control trade in parts or products of endangered species owned before the ESA went into effect; and specify rules for establishing experimental populations (16 U.S.C. 1539).

Major Provisions of Current International Law. For the United States, the ESA implements the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora ("CITES"; TIAS 8249; see CRS Report 94-675 ENR, *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species: Its Past and Future*), signed by the United States on March

3, 1973; and the Convention on Nature Protection and Wildlife Preservation in the Western Hemisphere (the “Western Hemisphere Convention”; 50 Stat. 1354; TS 981), signed by the United States on October 12, 1940. CITES parallels the ESA by dividing its listed species into groups, according to the estimated risk of extinction, but uses three major categories, rather than two. In contrast to the ESA, CITES focuses exclusively on trade and does not consider or attempt to address habitat loss. The ESA makes violations of CITES violations of U.S. law if committed within the jurisdiction of the United States (16 U.S.C. 1538). The ESA also regulates import and export of controlled products and provides some exceptions.

Issues in the 107th Congress

Reauthorization of ESA has been on the legislative agenda since the last authorization expired in 1992, and bills have been introduced that address particular aspects of endangered species protection.

Resource Conflicts. One of the express purposes of the ESA is to “provide a means whereby the ecosystems upon which endangered species and threatened species depend may be conserved.” (16 U.S.C. 1531(b)) As our nation runs out of open space and our population puts increasing pressures on our natural resources, the conservation of species and their habitats may highlight underlying resource and economic conflicts. Public values and affected economic interests may be complex and sometimes conflicting. Some of these situations have been the subject of Congressional oversight and legislative interest.

Klamath River Basin. For example, in the Klamath River Basin, which straddles the Oregon/California border, the Bureau of Reclamation consulted with the FWS and NMFS on operating the Klamath Project in 2001, an acute drought year. As a result of those consultations, the Bureau decided to allocate nearly all the water to the protection of two species of endangered suckers in Upper Klamath Lake, the project’s primary reservoir, and threatened coho salmon in the Klamath River, which drains the Basin. (Whether there is enough water to meet both needs may present another difficulty.) This action was taken to avoid jeopardizing these species and to meet obligations to the Klamath and Yurok tribes. The authority and duty of the Bureau to use irrigation water to preserve species was upheld in *Klamath Water Users Protective Association v. Patterson*, 204 F.3d 1206 (9th Cir, 1999). Because of the drought conditions, implementation of this operating plan meant that water could not be delivered to many irrigation-dependent Oregon farmers. In addition, the lack of downstream flows had adverse impacts on salmon fisheries and on federal wildlife refuges that are home to many migratory birds and ESA-listed bald eagles. Therefore, upstream farmers were pitted against salmon fishing, Native American interests, and other downstream users; all sides have policy concerns that can be asserted and involve valuable sectors of the local economy. Farmers point to their contractual rights and the hardships for their families; others note that the salmon industry may be more valuable and that farmers could be provided temporary economic assistance, while salmon extinction would be permanent. Still others assert that there are ways to serve all interests, or that the science underlying the agencies’ determinations is simply wrong. A federal district court denied a plea for release of water to the farmers (*Kandra v. United States*, 145 F. Supp. 1192 (D. Or. 2001)).

On March 13, 2002, the House Resources Committee held an oversight hearing on a National Academy of Science Interim Report evaluating two federal biological opinions on endangered and threatened fishes in the Klamath River Basin that had prevented the Bureau

from delivering water to many farmers in the Klamath Basin. The Academy released its report in February 2002 and concluded there was no sound scientific basis for maintaining Upper Klamath Lake levels and increased river flows as recommended in those biological opinions, nor sufficient basis for supporting the contrary assertions. On February 27, 2002, the Bureau released its 10-year biological assessment for its 10-year Klamath Project operation plan, in which it anticipated regular water deliveries to farmers for the 2002 growing season. Operating under a letter of permission from the FWS, the Bureau released only very low flows downstream in April and May 2002 and instead delivered water to the Upper Basin farmers. The Bureau also rejected the FWS and NMFS biological opinions on its 10-year operating plan and stated that it would comply for the immediate future but also request new consultation. For additional information, see CRS Report RL31098, *Klamath River Basin Issues: An Overview of Water Use Conflicts* and CRS Issue Brief IB10019, *Western Water Resource Issues*. Therefore, despite increased rains and water availability, the same set of issues and interests continue to be present.

Salmon Restoration. Similarly, salmon protection in the Pacific Northwest presents many difficult choices, especially now that regional hydropower facilities are playing an increasingly important role and drought conditions have become more severe. ESA listings by NMFS officials in 1999 and 2000 completed most of the pending decisions on Pacific salmon and steelhead trout, with a total of 26 distinct groups (i.e., evolutionarily significant units) now listed as either threatened or endangered. NMFS officials are working closely with state, local, and tribal officials, as well as the public, to develop a variety of recovery measures that address habitat restoration and other concerns. In late July 2000, NMFS decided, in response to an Army Corps of Engineers review, to delay any recommendation to Congress concerning whether or not to breach the four Lower Snake River hydroelectric dams to benefit salmon recovery. NMFS concluded, in a draft Biological Opinion and a Basin-Wide Recovery Strategy, that the four Lower Snake River dams should remain in place for at least 8 more years, to allow for a more complete assessment of progress toward recovering endangered salmon. The final Federal Columbia River Power System biological opinion, reflecting this policy, was released on December 21, 2000 (this opinion is available at [<http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/1hydrop/hydroweb/docs/Final/2000Biop.html>]).

In *Alsea Valley Alliance v. Evans* (161 F. Supp 2d 1154 (D.C. Or. 2001), Judge Hogan remanded the listing of the Oregon Coast Evolutionary Significant Unit of coho salmon as a threatened species, finding that listing to have been arbitrary and capricious under the Administrative Procedure Act. The ESA permits listing of a species, subspecies, or “distinct population segment.” This allows some species such as bald eagle to be listed in an area (such as the lower 48 states) even if a viable population exists somewhere else (such as Alaska). NMFS had clarified in a policy statement what was meant by distinct population segment in the context of certain fish. NMFS equated “distinct population segment” with being an “evolutionary significant unit (ESU)” (56 Fed. Reg. 58,612 (November 20, 1991)). An ESU is a population that is “substantially reproductively isolated from other conspecific population units” and “represent[s] an important component in the evolutionary legacy of the species” (56 Fed. Reg. 58,618). However, the NMFS policy on hatchery fish (58 Fed. Reg. 17,573 (April 5, 1993)) states that a hatchery population will not be considered part of an ESU if the hatchery population is of a different genetic lineage than natural populations; artificial propagation has produced appreciable changes in the hatchery population in characteristics that are believed to have a genetic basis; or there is substantial uncertainty

about the relationship between existing hatchery fish and the natural population (58 Fed. Reg. 17,575).

The mistake the Judge felt NMFS made with respect to coho salmon was to include in the coho ESU hatchery fish that in this instance were genetically identical to naturally hatched fish in the same water source, but *not* to count the same fish when deciding whether to list the coho or not. The court concluded that, in this instance, not considering the numbers of hatchery fish when making the listing decision was arbitrary and created a further distinction (hatchery-spawned vs. identical non-hatchery fish) below the level of ‘distinct population segment,’ which the agency lacked authority to do.

Although the United States did not appeal this decision, intervening parties have appealed, and the 9th Circuit blocked implementation of the lower court decision until the appellate case is heard. It is not clear how this case might affect other listings, since subsequent decisions could strike down other listings where genetically similar hatchery fish were included in ESUs but not counted in making the listing decisions. In addition, it is not clear whether courts will approve the NMFS hatchery policy that permits excluding from a population segment fish from a dissimilar genetic lineage, even if they otherwise meet the definition of the ESU. The decision could have implications for salmon listings in general.

Use of “Sound Science”. The ESA was enacted to conserve listed species – to bring them to the point where they do not need the special protections of the Act – and one of its purposes is to protect the ecosystems of which species listed as endangered are a part. The Act requires that decisions to list a species be made “solely on the basis of the best scientific and commercial data available” There is no elaboration on the meaning of this phrase in the law itself or in FWS regulations.

In many instances, there may be little information on many species facing extinction and few personnel and limited funds available to conduct studies on many of the less charismatic species, or those of little known economic value. What should be done in such instances? The Act does not expressly address this question, but it could be argued that, combining the protective purpose of the Act – to save and recover species – with the wording of “best ... data *available*,” arguably dwindling species should be given the benefit of the doubt and a margin of safety permitted. This is the position taken in the *FWS Handbook* at p. 1-6, which states that efforts should be made to develop information, but if a biological opinion must be rendered promptly, it should be based on the available information, “giving the benefit of the doubt to the species,” with consultation possibly being reinitiated if additional information becomes available. This phrase is drawn from H.R. Conf. Rep. No 697, 96th Cong., 2d Sess. 12 (1979), which stated the “best information available” language was intended to allow the FWS to issue biological opinions even when inadequate information was available, rather than being forced to issue negative opinions. But the report also states that if a biological opinion is rendered on the basis of inadequate information, the federal agency proposing an action has the duty to show its actions will not jeopardize a species and a continuing obligation to make a reasonable effort to develop information, and that the statutory language “continues to give the benefit of the doubt to the species.”

The FWS and NMFS developed a joint policy on Information Standards Under the Endangered Species Act (59 Fed. Reg. 34271 (July 1, 1994)) that might provide useful information on this issue. Under this policy, FWS and NMFS will receive and use

information from a wide variety of sources, including from individuals. Information may range from the informal – oral or anecdotal – to peer reviewed scientific studies, and hence the reliability of the information can also be variable. Service biologists are to impartially review and evaluate all information for purposes of listing, consultation, recovery, and permitting actions, and to ensure that any information used by the Services to implement the Act is “reliable, credible, and represents the best scientific and commercial data available.” Service biologists are to document their evaluations of all information and, to the extent consistent with the use of the best scientific and commercial data available, use primary and original sources of information as the basis of recommendations. In addition, documents developed by Service biologists will be reviewed to “verify and assure the quality of the science used to establish official positions, decisions, and actions”

Another joint policy notes that in addition to the public comments received on proposed listing rules and draft recovery plans, the Services will also formally solicit expert opinions and peer review to ensure the best biological and commercial information. With respect to listing decisions, the agencies will solicit the expert opinions of three specialists and summarize these in the record of final decision. Special independent peer review can also be used when it is likely to reduce or resolve an unacceptable level of scientific uncertainty (59 Fed. Reg. 34270 (July 1, 1994)).

Courts that have considered the “best data available” language have held that an agency is not obliged to conduct studies to obtain missing data (Southwest Center for Biological Diversity v. Babbitt, 215 F. 3d 58 (D.C. Cir. 2000)), but cannot ignore available biological information (Connor v. Burford 848 F. 2d 1441 (9th Cir. 1988)), especially if the ignored information is the most current (Southwest Center for Biological Diversity v. Babbitt, 926 F. Supp. 920 (D.C. Ariz. 1996), nor treat one species differently from the way other similarly-situated species are treated (*Ibid.*), and may not decline to list a dwindling species and wait until it is on the brink of extinction in reliance on possible but uncertain future actions of an agency (Biodiversity Legal Foundation v. Babbitt, 943 F. Supp. 23 (D. D.C. 1996). “‘Best scientific and commercial data available’ is not a standard of absolute certainty, and a fact that reflects Congress’ intent that the FWS take conservation measures before a species is ‘conclusively’ headed for extinction” (Defenders of Wildlife v. Babbitt, 958 F. Supp. 670, 680 (D. D.C. 1997)). If the FWS does not base its listings on speculation or surmise or disregard superior data, the fact that the studies it does rely on are imperfect does not undermine those authorities as the best scientific data available -- “the Service must utilize the best scientific ... data *available*, not the best scientific data *possible*” (Building Industry Ass’n of Sup. Cal. v. Norton, 247 F. 3d 1241, 1246-1267 (D.C. Cir. 2001), *cert. denied* 2002 U.S. LEXIS 479).

On the other hand, the availability of judicial review can help ensure that agency decisions and their use of scientific data are not “arbitrary or capricious” and that regulations are rationally related to the problems causing the decline of a species, especially in situations when other interests are adversely affected. (See Connor v. Andrus, 453 F. Supp. 1037 (W.D. Tx. 1978), striking down regulations totally banning duck hunting in an area in order to protect one species of duck). Another court stated that the bar the FWS has to clear in terms of evidence is very low, but it must at least clear it and, in the context of issuance of Incidental Take Permits, this means the agency must demonstrate that a species is or could be in an area before regulating it, and must establish the causal connection between the land use being regulated and harm to the species in question. Mere speculation as to the potential

for harm is not sufficient (*Arizona Cattle Growers Association v. United States Fish and Wildlife Service*, 273 F. 3d 1229 (9th Cir. 2001)).

Several bills have been introduced in the 107th Congress seeking to clarify the role of science in ESA decisions. H.R. 2829/S. 1912 would require greater weight be given to scientific or commercial data that is empirical or has been field-tested or peer-reviewed, while H.R. 3705/H.R. 4840 would modify the listing petition process and establish independent review boards. H.R. 4840 would also require collection of field data in all cases before listing could occur. The House Committee on Resources held a hearing on H.R. 2829 and H.R. 3705 on March 20, 2002, and on H.R. 4840 on June 18 and 19, 2002.

DOD Activities. The events of September 11, 2001, have focused attention on all statutes that might impinge on military training activities. The ESA allows for an exemption for activities involving national security, but an exemption has never been sought on this basis, there are no regulations that elaborate on it, and little information is available as to how it might apply in practice. It is, however, worded as an exemption for an individual action of an agency and is worded as an exemption that must be granted by the high-level committee assembled to consider exemptions.

On April 23, 2002, H.R. 4546 was reported (H.Rept. 107-436), with §312 proposing to limit the designation of CH on Department of Defense (DOD) lands. This measure was passed by the House on May 10, 2002. Section 312 of H.R. 4546 as passed by the House would amend the ESA in several respects. It would insert “or national security” into the CH evaluation process, thereby making consideration of that factor an express requirement. It also would prohibit designation of CH on DOD lands “subject to” the Sikes Act, another statute that provides for a land management process on such lands, if a plan “addresses” special management and protection of the lands. Because completion of a plan is not expressly required, but is implied by the fact that the Secretary must find that a plan “addresses” certain things, and the meaning of “addresses” is unclear, arguably this process would not be equivalent to designation of CH. The section would expressly retain the ESA duties to consult on agency activities and the prohibitions of the ESA would continue to apply. Section 1201(a) of S. 2225 also would eliminate designation of CH on DOD lands if a Sikes Act plan is completed that “addresses” endangered and threatened species and their habitat. On June 27, 2002, the Senate amended H.R. 4546 to substitute the language of S. 2514 (which did not contain language limiting the designation of CH on Department of Defense lands) and passed H.R. 4546, as amended. See CRS Report RL31415, *The Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and Department of Defense Readiness Activities: Current Law and Legislative Proposals*.

Under §7 of the ESA, the “reasonable and prudent alternatives” that FWS may suggest to an agency as part of consultation must be ones that “can be taken” by the agency. A regulation (50 C.F.R. §402.02) elaborates on this requirement as being measures that are economically and technologically feasible and “that can be implemented consistent with the scope of the Federal agency’s legal authority and jurisdiction.” In a case involving water use by the Army at Fort Huachuca, the final biological opinion of the FWS allegedly required the Army to take actions beyond its authority (although the court noted that the Army had voluntarily agreed to do similar things in a memorandum of agreement). However, the court remanded the final opinion because of other flaws, so the extent to which actions beyond the authority of the Army to complete may actually be required is not yet known. Although the

import of the wording is not clear, §705 of H.R. 4775 as passed by the House on May 24, 2002, addresses how water consumption at military installations is to be considered under the ESA, but similar provisions are not in the measure passed by the Senate on June 7, 2002, after the Senate substituted the language of S. 2551 as an amendment to H.R. 4775.

Private Property and Takings. Some landowners fear that the presence of an ESA-listed species or the designation of their land as CH for a listed species will result in restrictions of current or new activities on their land with subsequent loss of some or all of their property value. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest, who value the presence of a rare flower or frog on their land.

Under the Constitution, a person's property cannot be taken by the government without "just compensation," whether the taking occurs under the ESA or any other federal law. In the past, "taking" has been strictly interpreted by the courts and does not include restrictions on permitted uses or a decrease in the value of the land, unless the constraints are very severe and the prohibited uses could not have been barred at the time the property was acquired. The U.S. Court of Federal Claims ruled in (*Tulare Lake Basin Water Storage District, et al. v. US*, 49 Fed. Cl. 313 (2001)) that water could not be taken from certain California irrigators to benefit endangered fish unless compensation was provided. However, the outcome of this case rests on facts that may not be present in other instances, so the value of the case as precedent is not yet clear.

Critics of the ESA would like to see it amended to provide compensation in a broader range of circumstances than those required under the Constitution. These critics generally propose that compensation be offered for some specified percentage decrease in the value of property owners' assets (including losses related to any loss of use of their land), since they feel that property owners are otherwise being forced to bear the cost of a public benefit. Such provisions have been included in several bills introduced in previous Congresses. In the 107th Congress, H.R. 2389 and H.R. 2827 propose to compensate persons of the Klamath River Basin who were economically harmed as a result of ESA implementation, while S. 2604 would require the federal government to assume all costs relating to implementation of and compliance with the ESA.

Opponents of a revised "taking" standard counter that they do not wish to see the ESA singled out as having a different, more generous standard for compensation than that required under current interpretation of the Constitution or for any other agency or law. They further state that the rights of property owners to use their land have never been absolute, and that regulation in the public interest has long been accepted. The cost to the federal government from changed thresholds for compensation and the constraints that would likely be placed on the implementation of the ESA under a more lenient takings standard are among the contentious issues slowing action on ESA reauthorization. (See also CRS Report 93-346 A, *Endangered Species Act and Private Property Rights: A Legal Primer*.) However, both proponents and opponents of the ESA favor enacting incentives (primarily tax benefits) to encourage landowner cooperation.

Funding for Land Conservation. In the 106th Congress, several bills would have appropriated funds for acquiring lands to conserve listed species. These bills ultimately died, but additional funding for some of these programs was included in annual appropriations for FY2001 (Title VIII of P.L. 106-291), including the Cooperative Endangered Species

Conservation Program, which provides grants to states, including support for state land acquisition. Other federal land acquisition funds contained in Title VIII of P.L. 106-291 may benefit endangered species by protecting habitat, and this approach has re-surfaced in the 107th Congress (Title VII of H.R. 701/S. 1328). (For more information, see CRS Report RL30444, *Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA): A Comparison of Current Versions of H.R. 701 with Current Law.*)

Making the ESA More User-Friendly. Former Interior Secretary Babbitt initiated actions to decrease ESA conflicts in several ways. New FWS/NMFS joint policies streamline permit procedures for small landowners, and other initiatives encourage landowners to increase protection for populations of listed species on their land. Under “safe harbor” agreements, landowners who increase suitable habitat can return to “baseline conditions” without penalty. “No surprises” agreements provide landowners with greater certainty regarding activities that might otherwise have triggered penalties, an incentive for landowners to reach conservation agreements (i.e., habitat conservation plans or HCPs), since a landowner properly implementing such an agreement is assured that there will be no further costs or restrictions on the use of the property to benefit the species covered by the HCP, except by mutual consent or in extraordinary circumstances in which changes may be implemented by the government, without costs borne by the landowner. (See the final rule on Safe Harbor Agreements and Candidate Conservation Agreements (64 *FR* 32705; June 17, 1999 that modified the “no surprises” policy to require that a condition of a §10 incidental take permit be that if the permitted taking would be inconsistent with the survival and recovery of the relevant listed species, and the inconsistency is not remedied in a timely fashion, the incidental take permit may be revoked.) Federal managers focused on listing species as threatened rather than endangered, to allow FWS to take advantage of the ESA’s more flexible provisions for protecting threatened species. While administrative changes have been made within the framework of existing law, there is great interest among some groups in codifying many of these changes in an amended ESA. Others are critical of the agreements as difficult to enforce and as locking in the government to long-term positions that sometimes are based on inadequate knowledge.

Critical Habitat Designation. Under current law, FWS or NMFS must designate CH at the time a species is listed. Two exceptions are provided: if designation is not “prudent” (e.g., due to the threat of illegal collecting or killing), or if CH is not “determinable” due to insufficient data, in which case designation may be postponed as long as one year after species listing. The Clinton Administration supported restrictions on its own ability to designate CH under the ESA, as did the new Administration. (See *ESA Listing Caps, New and Old*, below.)

FWS, based on its interpretation of a regulation that takes away the value of designating habitat to the recovery of a listed species, asserts that CH offers little protection for a species beyond that already available under the listing process and is a poor use of scarce budgetary resources. According to FWS, CH designation shows its greatest conservation benefit when it includes areas not currently occupied by the species; these areas may be important as connecting corridors between populations or as areas where the species may be re-introduced. FWS designates CH for only about 10% of listed domestic species; yet in every case brought against FWS for failure to designate CH, the agency has lost, and, in a case involving FWS’s and NMFS’s failure to designate CH for threatened Gulf sturgeon, the Fifth Circuit found agency interpretation to be erroneous (*Sierra Club v. U.S. Fish and Wildlife*

Service, 245 F. 3d 434 (5th Cir. 2001), and a settlement agreement has resulted in a CH proposal. FWS had solicited comments on its proposal to “develop policy or guidance and/or revise regulations, if necessary, to clarify the role of habitat in endangered species conservation” (64 *FR* 31871-31874; June 14, 1999), but no proposal has been issued. See CRS Report RS20263, *The Role of Designation of Critical Habitat under the Endangered Species Act*.

CH is frequently misunderstood by the public to be a significant direct restriction on private landowners’ authority to manage land. While a landowner may experience some restrictions on land management because of the presence of an ESA-listed species and the presence of CH may shed light on whether “harm” has occurred, the express duty to avoid adverse modification of CH is an express obligation only for federal agencies and actions.

Additional Legislative Initiatives

On March 15, 2001, the House Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife, and Oceans held a hearing on reauthorizations for the African Elephant Conservation Act (H.R. 643), the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act of 1994 (H.R. 645), and the Asian Elephant Conservation Act of 1997 (H.R. 700). The Committee on Resources reported (amended) H.R. 643 (H.Rept. 107-93) and H.R. 700 (H.Rept. 107-94), and the House passed both these measures on June 12, 2001. H.R. 645 was reported by the Committee on Resources on June 25, 2001 (H.Rept. 107-109), and passed by the House later in the same day. On November 8, 2001, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works ordered that H.R. 700 (amended) reported. On November 30, 2001, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works reported H.R. 643 (S.Rept. 107-104) and H.R. 645 (S.Rept. 107-105). On December 7, 2001, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works reported H.R. 700 (S.Rept. 107-113). On December 18, 2001, the Senate passed H.R. 700 (amended), H.R. 643, and H.R. 645. On January 8, 2002, the President signed both H.R. 643 as P.L. 107-111 and H.R. 645 as P.L. 107-112. On January 23, 2002, the House agreed to the Senate amendments to H.R. 700. On February 12, 2002, the President signed H.R. 700, Asian Elephant Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2001 as P.L. 107-141.

Other measures propose to increase protection for bears (H.R. 397/S. 1125); exempt federal agencies from ESA consultation for certain activities (H.R. 472); modify the ESA regulatory process (H.R. 1402); modify federal land management activities under ESA (H.R. 1403); modify ESA provisions relating to liability for civil and criminal penalties (H.R. 1404); require the Department of Defense to fully comply with the ESA (§3(a) of H.R. 2154); provide compensation (H.R. 2389) or disaster relief (H.R. 2827) to Klamath Basin residents who were economically harmed by ESA-related actions; transfer ESA authority for anadromous fish from NMFS to FWS (H.R. 2409); direct the Secretary of the Interior to approve the HCP developed by the Imperial Irrigation District for the Salton Sea and provide for construction of habitat enhancement projects (H.R. 2764); expand protective measures for North Atlantic right whales (H.R. 3095/S. 1380); amend the ESA to authorize federal agencies to promptly respond to emergencies involving human health and safety (H.R. 3259); authorize funding for pallid sturgeon investigations in the Missouri River (§2(h)(3) of H.R. 3570); modify the communication and public hearing process related to ESA listing decisions involving the Administrative Procedures Act (H.R. 3706); authorize designation of survival habitat for listed species and specify its relation to critical habitat (H.R. 3707);

modify requirements for scientific data in designating critical habitat (H.R. 3798); specify requirements for listing the black-tailed prairie dog under the ESA (H.R. 3920); establish criteria for designating CH in Hawaii (H.R. 4656); modify the ESA listing, recovery planning, and delisting processes (S. 347); amend the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to expand the definition of “major disaster” to include an application of the ESA that causes severe economic hardship (S. 1384); amend the list of animal quarantine laws in §11(h) of the ESA (§18(b)(3) of S. 1482); authorize a water conservation program for agricultural lands in the Klamath, the Truckee-Carson, and Walker River Basins to benefit ESA-listed species (§226 of S. 1727); authorize funding for Pacific salmon restoration (S. 1825); modify federal land management practices to better coordinate ESA concerns (§202 of S. 2474); and require the federal government to assume all costs for ESA implementation and compliance (S. 2604). H.R. 3558 would authorize grants to states and local governments to combat invasive species; this measure was reported (amended) by the House Committee on Resources on June 18, 2002 (H.Rept. 107-512).

P.L. 107-171 included authorization of a wildlife habitat incentive program to preserve CH and avoid ESA listings (§2502) and an ESA amendment on animal quarantine laws (§10418(b)(3)). Attempts to include the Bear Protection Act of 2002 (H.R. 397/S. 1125) in this measure were stricken in conference

Title VII of H.R. 701/S. 1328 and Title II of S. 990 would provide dedicated funding to promote the recovery of ESA-listed species by property owners; H.R. 701 was ordered reported by the House Committee on Resources on July 25, 2001, while S. 990 was reported (amended) by the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works on December 13, 2001 (S.Rept. 107-123). The Senate passed S. 990 (amended) on December 20, 2001.

H.R. 1985, H.R. 3208, and S. 976 include language to authorize creation of an “environmental water account” within the CALFED process to provide water for ESA-listed fish; H.R. 3028 was reported (amended) by the House Committee on Resources on February 14, 2002 (H.Rept. 107-360, Part I). No action has been taken on the other measures.

On May 9, 2001, the Senate Environment Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Water held an oversight hearing on the ESA listing and delisting process. On February 16, 2002, the House Committee on Resources held an oversight field hearing at Grand Island, Nebraska, on the Platte River Cooperative Agreement and critical habitats. On March 6, 2002, the House Committee on Resources held an oversight hearing on the Canada Lynx Interagency National Survey and endangered species data collection. Two comprehensive bills, S. 911 and H.R. 4579, propose to reauthorize the ESA. No hearings have been held on either bill, and no action has been taken.

Appropriations Issues. Appropriations bills play an important role in the ESA debate. Appropriations provide funds for listing and recovery activities as well as finance FWS/NMFS consultation necessary for permits, such as Army Corps of Engineers permits, that are necessary for federal projects. See the table below for recent ESA funding. FY2002 Department of the Interior appropriations (FWS) were substantially increased in P.L. 107-63 (H.R. 2217), signed by President Bush on November 5, 2001. FY2002 Department of Commerce appropriations (NMFS) were signed by President Bush on November 28, 2001, as P.L. 107-77 (H.R. 2500). Funding for international endangered species programs were

considered in the FY2002 foreign operations bill (H.R. 2506), which was signed into law by the President as P.L. 107-115 on January 10, 2002.

On March 15, 2002, the House Committee on The Budget reported H.Con.Res. 353, wherein §406(b) expresses the sense of Congress that Pacific Northwest salmon recovery is a high-priority item for funding in the FY2003 federal budget (H.Rept. 107-376); this measure was passed by the House on March 20, 2002.

ESA Listing Caps, New and Old. Beginning in FY1998, Congress enacted annual limits (i.e., “caps”) on funding FWS for its ESA listing function. This language limits FWS discretion to transfer funds to finance additional listings: if courts mandate agency action on listing certain species, other listings may not be able to be funded. FWS supported these limits to assure that funding for other agency programs could not be diverted to finance additional ESA listing activities. However, courts have held that budget constraints do not excuse an agency from compliance, in some circumstances.

Endangered Species Program Appropriations (x \$1000)

	FY2000 Enacted	FY2001 Request	FY2001 Enacted	FY2002 Request	FY2002 Enacted	FY2003 Request
Candidate Conservation	7,388	8,447	7,052	7,220	7,620	8,682
Listing	6,208	7,195	6,341	8,476	9,000	9,077
Consultation	32,342	39,400	42,750	41,901	45,501	47,770
Recovery	57,363	55,297	59,835	54,217	63,617	60,215
Subtotal	103,301	110,339	115,978	111,814	125,738	125,744
Landowner Incentive	4,981	4,981	4,969	0	40,000	50,000
Stewardship Grants	0	0	0	0	10,000	10,000
Coop. End. Species Conservation Fund (CESCF)	23,000	65,000	104,694*	54,694	96,235	91,000
Total FWS	131,282	180,320	225,641	166,508	271,973	276,744
Total NMFS	55,470	64,914	102,476	108,314	101,483	110,845

Sources: Annual budget justifications, House and Senate committee reports, and floor debates.

* Of the FY2001 CESCF funds, \$77.829 million was provided in Title VIII of P.L. 106-291.

The George W. Bush Administration’s FY2002 budget proposed a new version of this cap by requesting authority to prioritize listings within the cap, regardless of judicial orders. The Administration stressed that (a) current court orders alone meant that FWS’s ESA listing function was likely to run out of funds before the end of the fiscal year, and (b) if FWS were

to make listing determinations on merely its own estimated backlog, the cost would be roughly \$120 million. The agency's critics (calling the language an "extinction rider") responded that (1) few listings would have taken place in the last several years without the lawsuits; (2) the FWS's claims of conscientious attention to the ESA are contradicted by FWS's failure to seek adequate funding to address the backlog of ESA listings in light of its assertion of a \$120 million need; (3) the restriction is one-sided since de-listings and down-listings would have no such cap; and (4) the new authority would be a fundamental change in the ESA, since FWS could choose which species to protect, rather than protecting all species meeting the criteria specified under §4(b) of the ESA.

Acting on H.R. 2217 (FY2002 Department of the Interior appropriations), the House Appropriations Committee rejected the Administration's proposed language change, retained the current \$8.48 million cap on spending for listing activities, and accepted a "subcap" of \$6 million on the designation of new CH. Therefore, if FWS were ordered to designate even a few areas of CH, funding for new ESA species listings could be restricted to no more than \$2.48 million. The Senate passed a \$9 million cap on listing, but did not include a "subcap" on CH, nor did it accept the Administration's proposed change. The conference agreement (H.Rept. 107-234, October 11, 2001) adopted the \$9 million funding level for the listing program and specified that the \$6 million CH designation limitation is exclusive of funds needed for litigation support. This measure was signed as P.L. 107-63 on November 5, 2001. The Bush Administration's FY2003 budget proposes \$9.077 million for listing, with a subcap of \$5 million for CH.

LEGISLATION

Related public laws and bills are discussed in the text of this document under "Background and Analysis."

P.L. 107-63 (H.R. 2217); P.L. 107-77 (H.R. 2500); P.L. 107-111 (H.R. 643); P.L. 107-112 (H.R. 645); P.L. 107-115 (H.R. 2506); P.L. 107-141 (H.R. 700); and P.L. 107-171 (H.R. 2646).

H.Con.Res. 353 (Nussle); H.R. 397 (Gallegly); H.R. 472 (Radanovich); H.R. 701 (Young of Alaska); H.R. 1402 (Thomas); H.R. 1403 (Thomas); H.R. 1404 (Thomas); H.R. 1985 (Calvert); H.R. 2154 (Filner); H.R. 2389 (Herger); H.R. 2409 (Otter); H.R. 2764 (Hunter); H.R. 2827 (Walden); H.R. 2829 (Walden); H.R. 3095 (Delahunt); H.R. 3208 (Calvert); H.R. 3259 (McInnis); H.R. 3558 (Rahall); H.R. 3570 (Bereuter); H.R. 3705 (Pombo); H.R. 3706 (Pombo); H.R. 3707 (Pombo); H.R. 3798 (Tancredo); H.R. 3920 (Thune); H.R. 4546 (Stump); H.R. 4579 (George Miller); H.R. 4656 (Mink); H.R. 4775 (Young of Florida); H.R. 4840 (Hansen); S. 347 (Thomas); S. 911 (Smith of Oregon); S. 976 (Feinstein); S. 990 (Smith of New Hampshire); S. 1125 (McConnell); S. 1267 (Crapo); S. 1328 (Landrieu); S. 1380 (Kerry); S. 1384 (Smith of Oregon); S. 1727 (Reid); S. 1731 (Harkin); S. 1825 (Boxer); S. 1912 (Smith of Oregon); S. 2225 (Levin); S. 2474 (Craig); and S. 2604 (Enzi).